

. . . Admiral Turner's talk to Office of Personnel careerists on Monday, 24 April 1978, at 1:30 p.m. in the Auditorium . . .

ADMIRAL TURNER: Good afternoon. I am pleased to have this opportunity to be with you early in your program and what I did is last night I sat down and said to myself, "I talk an awful lot about personnel matters around here" and I just jotted down a list of the things that I seem to talk about the most and I wanted to share them with you today. I haven't any formal talk or organization to this so it's going to be hit and miss, but you will know what's on my mind.

The first thing that's on my mind is that there is nothing more on it than personnel management issues. I think it's the most important issue in any organization. I think it's particularly critical in our organization today, in a period of change. I think that if I have one overriding objective in what I would like to accomplish as the DCI it's to feel, when I leave, that I have helped to ensure that this agency in 1988, and maybe 1998, will have as fine, as dedicated, as capable people as it has in 1978 and has had since 1947.

I don't think that any of us in a large organization like this can ever relax on keeping that kind of a goal in mind and you're the people who most have to do it. If you don't pay attention to your personnel management issues from day one you're going to be in trouble because things aren't static, and particularly in our country in the last five or ten years I think there's been a dramatic change in the attitude, the outlook of young people. They're smarter, they're equally dedicated but in different ways, and they have different incentives and different rewards, and if we are going to have them here in 1988 and 1998, and the same kind and quality that we have today, we've got to be sure we are adapting to that. Now, I'm just going to hit some of the things that I think I'm most anxious to ensure that we are adapting to. As I say, there is no particular rhyme or reason to these, but they're on my mind.

One is that if you're going to have these good people come in and if you're going to retain them, you've got to have some kind of a flow-through system. You've got to have a reasonable prospect of promotion, of opportunity, and a clear understanding of it so people know where they stand, and I think that's particularly true with young people today, more so than it was a decade ago.

Now, I think that means that we must have a steady flow of input at the bottom, and I believe our record is not good in this respect. It goes up and down and there isn't a firm plan in all directorates for how many people need to come in each year in order to ensure that there aren't humps and valleys, and in some of our directorates we really cannot afford humps and valleys.

If you have to -- if you see a whole group of the top people in DDO, as we see today, likely to retire in a short span of years, where do you go to get replacements? In DDS&T you can go out, if you have to, and get scientists on the outside in many of their spots, not all of them. In DDA you can get many of your skills, if you have to, on the outside. There is nowhere you can go to get a case officer or a station chief if you've got a void because you had a hump and they all left you at the same time. You've got to have a steady flow and it's preferable in all the directorates in this kind of work that we are in, that you not have to have large infusions from the outside or an inordinate pace of acceleration of promotions inside so people don't get the experience opportunity at the various grades in order to fill gaps that can exist if you haven't had a steady flow. I'm dedicated to organizing it so we do that, but all of you recognize better than I that a steady flow of input at the bottom means a steady flow of output somewhere.

I would say what you need to do as personnel managers is tell me in each different type of occupation we have what's the average life in the Agency, 10 years, 15, 20, and then simply take the number of people we have in that category and divide by 10, 15, 20, whatever it is, and that's the number that

has to come in every year or we are not renewing the corpus. How do you get that corresponding number out? Well, there are two ways.

One, first we must establish an absolute standard of competence below which we cannot accept people continuing with us and we must, on a regular basis, review each grade, each skill within the Agency and say, "Are there people in this grade and this skill category who are performing below that absolute standard," and if they are they've got to go.

If I would fault this agency from my experience in it in the past year and a quarter, it's been hanging onto too many people because we didn't want to face up to letting them go when they were below that standard. If you look at our record of leaks, of disclosures, of embarrassments because people didn't carry out orders, you will find a lot of them were in that category, were identifiable in advance.

We are in too delicate a business to have people who are not competent to our standard. You cannot tolerate it in this sensitive a business and if I am told that they're a risk if they go out because they have so much information that they may give to the other side, I will tell you I would rather accept that risk than I would accept having incompetents, insubordination, failure to carry orders, possible traitorousness inside. It's much worse of a threat to us.

Secondly, you get people out because you establish relative standards. You have to look at the bottom three or five percent every year and you have to say, "Do I need more people in this grade and this skill to leave the Agency in order to meet the flow-through situation," and if you do it's tough, but some of those people on the bottom relative performance -- they may be meeting satisfactory standards, but they're going to have to go in order to make room for the flow through that I'm talking about, the promotion opportunity, the accessions at the bottom.

Now, I'm criticized from time to time. People say that leaves everybody uncertain around here. I'd like

to ask a show of hands - how many of you think you're in the bottom three percent? You don't have to put your hands up - (laughter). I want people in the bottom three percent to feel scared - I do. They ought to feel uncertain, they ought to feel like they may be asked to leave. That's the only way we are going to get them to turn on the gas and perform like they're up in the top three percent.

I'm not terribly sympathetic if people are complaining because they're afraid they're going to be kicked out, but they know they are in the bottom three percent. They have to turn on the gas and go. I'm very unsympathetic to the fact that a lot of people in our agency are under CIARDS and yet they complain because they may be asked to leave after they're eligible to retire. I don't understand CIARDS completely, but it sure seems to me it was intended to be a way of helping the Agency keep young and vigorous by asking people to leave once they've achieved eligibility for retirement.

I'd like to throw a challenge to you today. I think what we need most in many ways is to develop a theory of tenure. I totally reject the general impression that a lot of people have, that once you join the Agency and at least once you pass the probationary period you've got full tenure, a 100% tenure around here, just like university professors in some cases. We can't live with that; no way we can.

But on the other hand, I certainly don't want people to live here with a feeling that there is great arbitrariness and they may be just plucked off the vine tomorrow. No way we can promote the retention of the good people that I'm talking about under those circumstances.

So the challenge I'd like to put to you is to develop a theory of tenure for this agency and I would suggest that you proceed in some kind of line like this: you have a very high vulnerability to being asked to leave during your first three years, during what we call the probationary period. I recently had a MAG group come to me and say they thought there

should be a second probationary period of another four years - lesser risk of being asked to leave, but still on a pseudo probationary status. I don't know if that's a good idea or not.

We are going very rigorously to the three-year probationary period and a clear demarcation at the end of that period. You're in or you're out, and people should know that they have passed that hurdle very explicitly. From the time you've passed through probation and until the time you're eligible to retire -- I'm sorry, from the time you've passed through probation and until three or four years before you're eligible to retire, it's my view that you ought to be vulnerable to being asked to leave the Agency only on the two conditions that I have outlined, you fall below the absolute standard of performance or you're in the bottom three, five percent and we need openings in your particular bracket in order to promote the overall benefit of the Agency, the flow through, the advancement, the input problem. You should know that, and you should know that as long as you keep up in the top 90% somewhere that you're going to be all right.

Three or four years before you're eligible to retire I'd like to have you tell me how we can work out a program such that your eligibility, your vulnerability to being asked to leave for other than competence -- if you fall below that absolute standard we've got to let you go at any time, but as far as being asked to leave on the verge of being eligible to retire when it's just a matter of opening up opportunities for the flow-through situation -- I'd like to try to avoid that because I think people have made a real contribution to us by then and they are part of our family and they should have some assurance we are not going to take them six months short of retirement and ask them to go off and lose all that equity.

I don't know if that can be worked out, but I think we ought to try, and then once people become eligible for retirement, either under Civil Service or CIARDS, I think they should understand from the day they come in here that they're vulnerability goes way up. We're not going to ask them all

to leave, I'm just saying that they have to accept the possibility that at that stage they may be asked to leave depending on where they stand on the relative performance so we don't get clogged at the top and suddenly have all our vice presidents leave and we have no way to fill in behind them.

Let me emphasize I'm not talking about an up or out philosophy here at all; that's not what I'm mentioning. With what I've described to you, people could stay in one grade for 5, 10, 15 years as long as they stay up above that bottom percentage. It's not a matter of you have to move up in order to stay in the organization. That's not my theory at all.

In fact, another point that comes up frequently in my discussions with MAG groups and other groups around the Agency is, "What do we do about people who want to be specialists and not managers?" I hear that so regularly from all directorates that I really think we've got to work on that some more. Now, there are lots of ways in the Agency that that's handled now with the SPS system, with the OS and the OG system in the DDO and so on, but despite this it's a recurring theme in every directorate, "How do we get to retain the technical skills of a good analyst, the scientific skills of a research man, the managerial skills" -- I'm sorry, not the managerial skills, "the case officer skills in the DDO, communications skills and so on, without forcing these people to assume managerial responsibilities, dilute their technical capability in order to get promoted?"

It seems to me it's simple to do whether we make more of our supergrades SPSs and whether we create something like that in the non-supergrades, or whether we just designate certain assignments within the Agency to be non-managerial and insist that people who go into them are on a non-managerial track. They can't hop back and forth, once they opt for that track they are on it, because they have missed their managerial learning experiences if they do.

It seems to me that something like that can be done and that we, perhaps, as an agency have more need for this kind of thing than many other organizations in our government or in the civilian world. I'm told that PMCD won't let me do this - (laughter). If PMCD will step forward I will talk about it - (laughter).

But seriously, clearly there are lots of problems, clearly it's easy for me to sit up here and think in broad conceptual terms and I know there are lots of regulations and Civil Service rules and there is the constant necessity to be equitable to everybody so that we don't have inequities in the organization that cause greater morale problems than those we are trying to solve, but I think we have to -- and I throw it out to you as another challenge -- work something out to ensure that we do permit our specialists, who want to, to avoid the managerial responsibility.

Now, it may mean they're a GS-16 and they're working for a GS-14. They've got to learn to accept that if they're going to do it. The manager will be a 14 but he may have a 16 working for him. I think lots of people would be happy to accept that so they could advance, but stay in the field they really like and not get tied up with all the other responsibilities.

Talking of management, I think we need to address the very, very common complaint that we haven't trained our managers well enough and, boy, we have handicaps and problems here, cover and congressional limitations on outside schooling and so on, but again, it's such a universal complaint that I suggest it's one that you should be talking about and looking to solving.

We are working right now very vigorously -- and Fred gave me today a timetable on this -- for an increased program of lateral transfers within the Agency. I think that's very important in this direction because there are different managerial styles in different directorates and different places, and part of really managing well in this organization when you move up towards the top is understanding more than your branch, than

your division, than your directorate, and that cross training that can be had at all echelons will do much, I think, to improve managerial capabilities, but more than that is needed, more schooling, more training, more emphasis somehow on helping people acquire the basic managerial skills.

Visibility: I believe and have believed for many years one of the fundamental ingredients of a good personnel management system is that it be well understood and its procedures, its results, be visibly known to people. You're always caught between the theorists who say, "If you let everybody know where he stands, all those in the bottom half will be discouraged and quit, all those in the upper half will be happy and stay," but you can't run anything with half the organization.

The second theory is that if you tell people where they stand, those in the bottom half will charge harder and try to move into the upper half, and those in the upper half will be pleased and motivated also. I happen to belong to the second school of thought, partly because I just think it's honest and I think we must do more to publicize our promotion system, the results, we must do more to ensure that how we are doing our personnel management, be it promotions, be it assignments, be it various incentives that are given around the organization, must be well known to everybody.

In particular, there's a very common complaint in the corridors that when new jobs open up, somebody moves on, there is a little cabal that organizes to keep everybody from knowing that and applying for that job except the one person the supervisor wants to get into it. I don't know whether that's true. I'm less concerned with whether it's true or not, except I'm concerned if people believe it. We've got to give visibility to job openings. We've got to ensure that before they're filled, that people have had ample opportunity to learn about them, to apply for them and to feel that they were genuinely considered for them.

Another problem that you have in any personnel management organization is efficiency reports, fitness

reports, because you can't manage well unless you've got the basic tools for doing it. During the DDO cuts a couple of DDO'ers came to me and said, "Admiral, you've got such a poor efficiency report system and the reports are so vague and so uncertain that you can't go ahead with this program. You're being unfair to a lot of people because they're being judged by very poor documentation." My reaction was, "I think that's terrible, I'm unhappy, I'm sorry, but I'm not going to wait ten years until we can get a system going and lots of reports accumulated for each individual to decide how we are going to judge between who is of most service to the Agency and who is of least."

But again, this is a tremendous challenge to you in the personnel business, it exists in all of industry, it exists in all of the government. I'm not sure what the right answer is, but I've gotten so tired of reading fitness reports that go on for three pages that I'm very sorely tempted, when the study group that's supposed to report out today, I think, on this comes back, I may cross off part of it and say all ratings will be written by hand - (laughter).

It would be no harder on the people reading them, even though handwriting isn't always good, because none of us are going to write 22 pages of nonsense if we have to do it by scrawl. It would be harder for the individuals to read when they're reviewing, but it will be a lot shorter and the net strain on your eyeballs will be less. We've got to establish some firm rules, we've got to do more educating of our supervisors.

I'm tired of reading what is done on station so-and-so. It bears no relationship in most cases to what "Joe Jones" or "Mary Smith" did, it just tells me what they do in That's all very interesting, but it doesn't help me decide whether "Joe" or "Mary" are the right person for this next assignment that I'm considering.

We've got to get people to write about the individual and do so succinctly, do so critically, but fairly. It's not easy, it's a problem that exists in all of our

personnel management systems, but it's one that you have to continue attacking and we need your imagination, your ideas on how to do it.

Equal opportunity: I don't want to leave my check list of points of concern to me today without saying, although I recognize tremendous effort has been made here, that we are not doing well enough and we must redouble our efforts. Just the other day somebody said, "Well, you know, really there aren't many minorities in this particular section because a few years ago General So-and-So was in charge down there and he wouldn't have any."

Well, we can't tolerate generals or supergrades or anybody else of that kind of thinking in our organization and we won't, and we must make every opportunity to ensure that we are not only doing things in a totally unbiased way, but that it is clear to all of our employees that that is what we are doing and that's the only thing we want to do.

There are many more opportunities, in particular for women, in our organization than we have been filling, in my opinion, whether they're case officers in the field or they're supervisors in the headquarters, and clearly there is no bar to the capabilities of minorities of any kind in the kinds of things that we do.

I have been asked to comment on whether it's really worthwhile for all of you to tackle all of these problems that I'm laying out and that others will for you in this conference, because after all maybe sitting up your sleeve there the Director's got another major cut or another major reorganization, and what's going to fall out if we get all this stuff organized and everything goes to pot here?

Well, let me assure you there is nothing up my sleeve. The organizations, the cuts, are over with. I don't guarantee you we won't do shuffling. I am firmly persuaded in my own mind - and all my advisers tell me I am absolutely wrong - that we are grossly over-staffed in a number of areas. I am equally

STAT persuaded that we are under-staffed in others. I am persuaded that we have taken out the one really gross over-staffing in the DDO or I wouldn't have acceded this year to increases in all the other directorates which we put in for in the '79 budget if I thought we were in an ☐ surplus or something in one of the other directorates.

But I do feel that over the years some sections of the Agency have kept their strength when their importance and workload is decreased and others have come along that haven't had adequate resources put into them, and I would be dishonest if I didn't tell you I thought there will be continual shifting of assets, continual shifting of organization, but I don't have some big master plan up my sleeve that's going to upset all the apple carts around here. I'm very pleased that we are on a much more stable basis today with the President's reorganization, my shift of the DDO positions, virtually behind us.

Let me conclude by telling you a personal story. Twenty-four years ago I was a young lieutenant at the Pentagon and one day Admiral Arleigh Burke, the Chief of the Navy, sent for me on no notice. I walked into his office -- I had never seen the man, I didn't know him at all, he sat me down and said, "Turner, tell me what's wrong with the Navy."

That was a big order and 10, 15 minutes later, after we talked about it, he sent me out and said, "Now, Turner, get 12 of your contemporaries together and you write me a report on how to improve the personnel situation in the United States Navy." Well, that was a great challenge and I appreciated the opportunity to communicate directly with the boss.

I got my friends together and we sat down for a couple of months and we came up with 32 recommendations on what to do to improve the personnel situation in the U.S. Navy. It went to Admiral Burke, he sent it over to the Chief of Naval Personnel and a couple of months later the answer came back - thirty of the recommendations weren't very good and two had already been taken care of - (laughter).

Now, as lieutenants we weren't the brightest people and we had a narrow, parochial vision and I'm sure that all 32 of these weren't the best things in the world, but there was a point missed by the Chief of Naval Personnel and that's the last point I'd like to make with you because you all bear a cross. You're in the personnel business and you bear a cross, that everybody knows how to do your job better than you, everybody is intensely interested in it and everybody complains about what you do.

But the Chief of Naval Personnel did not appreciate that it was quite important that a representative group of young officers perceived there to be 32 kinds of important problems, and not wanting to really take care of any of them was not, I think, indicating that he was in tune with the situation in the personnel end of the Navy at that time.

I'm not saying that I believe all the complaints that I hear when I meet with groups of people or wander around the building are true, but I am saying that as long as I encounter recurring opinions and beliefs that we are not managing personnel in the way we should, then I think we have a problem of perceptions and we have to correct that, and that's the challenge to you because frequently what you are doing is the right way to do it, but when you come back to me and tell me that complaint was no good and it's all because we are doing everything perfectly, I still have to have a degree of skepticism that we are not persuading people that we are doing it correctly.

In the case I cited to you, at least the Chief of Naval Personnel should, in my opinion, have come back with a way to redress the attitudes of young officers towards the major of these 32 problems rather than simply explaining that they didn't know what they were talking about.

It's a challenge to you. As I say, it's a cross to you, but there is probably no group more important to the health, the future of our agency than you who do so much

for and care so much about as Personnel. It's all we are. We are never any better than what the quality of our people is and that is my number one goal, to ensure that we continue the same dedicated, capable, wonderful people we have today. I thank you for what you have done and are doing, and as a result of this kind of stimulation that you're going through in this program you will do even better in the future. Thank you.

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